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CEYLON

REPORT ON VISIT TO CEYLON*, DECEMBER 6-11, 1960

By Z. I. Kertesz

1. I arrived in Colombo via TWA from Bangkok 1640 hours on December 6. At the airport I was met by Mr. Shelton Deutrom of the Embassy staff who helped me through customs and took me to the Galle Face Hotel where I had a reservation and where I lived most of the time when I was a Nutrition Officer in Ceylon for FAO during 1952-53.
2. The next morning, December 7, I went to the American Embassy and met Miss Frances Hyland, Second Secretary, who was in charge of making arrangements for my visit. I described to her the purpose of my visit and she brought me up-to-date concerning recent developments in Ceylon. Throughout my stay in Ceylon Miss Hyland was most helpful in arranging appointments and contacts for me. I found at the Embassy the ICNND Manuals and Survey Reports shipped by the Secretariat and was told that the film of the Ethiopia survey was already at the USIS. A showing of the film and a conference of interested personnel had been scheduled for 1500 hours on Friday, December 9, at the USIS. Miss Hyland suggested that I talk first of all with Mr. Philip L. Riley, Health and Education Advisor, USOM, and arranged an appointment for me for later in the morning.
3. Mr. Riley, who has been in Ceylon for some time and has had considerable previous field experience in South America, seemed much interested in my description of the ICNND approach to nutrition surveys and in the

* Ceylon is a self-governing dominion of the Commonwealth of Nations. It is located on an island off the southeast coast of India, extending 270 miles in the North-South and 140 miles in the East-West direction. Most of the island is flat, but in the Central and South parts mountains rise to 8,000 feet. Tea, rubber, coconut, and rice are the main agricultural products but Ceylon is heavily dependent on food imports, particularly rice and wheat flour. About one half of the population of nearly 10 million lives in the Dry Zone of about 12,250,000 acres in the Northern and Eastern parts of the island while the other half lives in the Wet Zone of about 4,000,000 acres covering the Central, Western and Southern regions. Since the tragic murder of Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in September, 1959, uncertainty characterizes the political situation and the present Prime Minister, Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, maintains a precarious parliamentary majority with the aid of the leftist parties. During the five years since the signing of the first Ceylon-American bilateral aid agreement in April, 1956, the United States provided Ceylon grants and loans of \$64,633,000, almost two thirds of this consisting of agricultural surplus products supplied under PL 480. Both the United Nations and its agencies and the Colombo Plan have been providing substantial economic and technical assistance to Ceylon. The New York Times reported on December 26, 1960, that the USSR has given Ceylon \$33,600,000 in credit to help the current Ten Year Plan.

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possibility of a survey in Ceylon. He stated that the Department of Health and its Director of Health Services are the logical contacts in leading up to a survey but that both the Director and his Deputy were out of town. I succeeded in talking with both of them before leaving Ceylon. He suggested that in addition to the Friday showing of the Ethiopia survey film in Colombo, I also present it on Saturday at the district meeting of teachers to be held December 9-11 near Matale, some 90 miles Northeast of Colombo. The subject of the meeting was "The health of students" and a number of health officials, including the Deputy Director of Health, were to be present at that meeting. Mr. Riley, who apparently was the moving spirit behind this conference, kindly put me on the program for Saturday evening and arranged for transportation. It was my impression that Mr. Riley felt that a successful nutrition survey would benefit both Ceylon and the United States. Ceylon has a long tradition of nutrition surveys but no surveys of sufficiently broad scope have ever been conducted there. As for the nutritional health of the population, there seems to be little doubt about need for improvement, particularly in the low income groups. He noted that riboflavin seems to be deficient in the diet and that anemia of some obscure origin seems to be common. My discussions with Mr. Riley were most satisfactory and I believe that he would be a key person in the organization of an ICNND nutrition survey in Ceylon.

4. Wednesday afternoon I called on Dr. D.B. Gunasekera, Acting Deputy Director of Health (Laboratory Services); currently in charge of the Medical Research Institute (MRI) at Baseline Road 9. During my stay in Ceylon seven years ago Dr. Gunasekera was head of the Nutrition Division of MRI and we had extensive contacts. Dr. B. V. Mahadeva, currently in charge of the Nutrition Division, was also present during our discussion. The MRI is an organization of world-wide renown and has been substantially expanded since my last call in 1953. We discussed the ICNND surveys and briefly the possibility of a Ceylon survey. Dr. Gunasekera seemed interested but clearly felt that decisions and arrangements should be made at a higher level. Space is still a difficult problem at the MRI in spite of a new wing added recently. My impression was that this was mostly a matter of house-keeping. The MRI provides many constantly required routine laboratory services from serum preparation to biochemical work for the hospitals and thus is only in part a research organization. However, it has a fine staff and the Nutrition Division alone has four members with doctorates and five "inspectors" trained in nutrition survey techniques. Dr. Gunasekera seemed under pressure from being in charge of MRI. Apparently he is not seeking the Directorship which is an administrative position of lower pay and prestige than his position in the Nutrition Division. Due to his intimate knowledge of nutrition problems in Ceylon and his experience with nutrition surveys, Dr. Gunasekera could

be of much help in both arranging and conducting an ICNND nutrition survey in Ceylon. He suggested that there might be difficulty in finding personnel for a large team and a two-months survey but, as will be noted below, such might not be needed. Our very satisfactory discussion ended with Dr. Gunasekera showing me the various Divisions and laboratories of the MRI.

5. On Thursday morning, I visited the Government Marketing Department Factory, situated next to the Milk Board's milk processing plant. Mr. L. A. C. Alles, Chemist (Food Technology) is in charge of this plant which is the only sizable canning and food processing factory in Ceylon. Mr. Alles, trained in Australia as a Colombo Plan fellow, has been in charge of this development and is indeed a key person in food technology in Ceylon. The plant has been developed to process 18,000 cans per day with total yearly production around 750,000 cans of food, mostly pineapples but also including pineapple juice and jam, grapefruit, passion fruit juice, lime juice, mangoes, and a variety of minor products. There are plans for further development of this plant and considerable experimental work is being conducted with new products - a very impressive show indicating much progress since my last visit in 1953 and apparently having substantial government support. All buildings and processing equipment were purchased by the government and not from aid funds.
6. Thursday afternoon I had an appointment with Col. H. C. Serasinghe, Senior Medical Officer, Ceylon Army Medical Corps at the Army Hospital. The hospital has 120 beds. (I have no official information on the size of the Ceylon Armed Forces but was told that it consists of approximately 10,000 men in the Army, 5,000 men in police units, 1,500 men in the Navy and 1,000 men in the Air Force.) I presented a brief outline of ICNND operations and the Colonel asked many questions. In Colombo about as many military people eat in messes as at home. Col. Serasinghe noted that a survey would provide an interesting comparison of the adequacy of the diet from the two sources. No nutrition survey of the Ceylon Armed Forces has been conducted. There is an army camp about 16 miles from Colombo where recruits are trained and a second camp near Trincomali on the Northeast coast. Apparently food intake in Army messes is calculated only on the calorie basis. The Colonel was most cordial and interested, and assured me of his cooperation if a survey is conducted. It was my impression from this discussion that Col. Serasinghe felt that the Army might well benefit by such a survey. I did not have time to visit Squadron Leader W. M. K. Wijetunga, Principal Medical Officer of the Air Force and Surgeon Lt. Commander A. Balakrishnan, Senior Medical Officer of the Navy. They no doubt would wish to have their Branches included if a survey is conducted of the Ceylon Armed Forces.

7. Later Thursday afternoon I called on Dr. A. Sungaralingam, Director of the Ceylon Institute of Scientific and Industrial Research (CISIR) which was founded in 1955 with World Bank assistance. The institute is housed in a beautiful modern laboratory building and has an excellent staff and the best technical library in Ceylon. It has fine up-to-date scientific and testing equipment but apparently has some difficulty in maintaining its more-or-less autonomous operation. The CISIR does mostly contract research for industry and other outside sources and the government utilizes this facility to only a very limited extent. The CISIR worked on five projects dealing with food, including some work on coconut proteins and tests on meat canning. In the absence of any other food research facilities, it is unfortunate that the CISIR is not more extensively used by the Government in the field of food research and products development. My major reason for the visit was to assess the possibility of using the CISIR laboratories for the biochemistry phase of a nutrition survey. However, this would seem to be an artificial arrangement with little chance of continued operation after the end of the survey. This is regrettable because laboratory facilities at the CISIR are excellent and no other organization has anything like it in Ceylon. One may hope that the CISIR will eventually undertake at least some of the investigations which are so sorely needed in the food field in Ceylon.
8. Friday, being my last day in Ceylon when offices were open, I first went to the Embassy to call on Miss Hyland who kindly arranged for me to meet Mr. C. William Kontos, Deputy Director of USOM, to whom I explained my mission. Afterwards I called on Mr. Turner C. Cameron, Jr., Counselor and in charge of the Embassy, and had an interesting discussion of similar nature. My impression from both talks was that the ICNND would obtain good local support from United States officials in arranging a nutrition survey but that a certain extent of hesitancy was introduced into all talks of the future on account of the local political instability. Both Mr. Cameron and Mr. Kontos were most cordial and I was pleased to have had this opportunity to tell them about the ICNND and its surveys.
9. I had an appointment with Dr. N. G. Baptist, Reader in the Biochemistry Department, University of Ceylon. Dr. A. A. Hoover, the Head of the Department, was in India. During my year in Ceylon I worked closely with both Dr. Baptist and Dr. Hoover, particularly in conjunction with the meetings of the Food and Nutrition Board. The Medical School is greatly overloaded with students. Classroom space is so limited that many lectures have to be delivered two or three times. Some buildings are under construction but the congested situation is likely to prevail for some years. In spite of this, the number of students is being increased in order to provide more adequate medical services throughout Ceylon. With Dr. Baptist I called

briefly on the Dean of the Medical Faculty, Professor O. E. R. Abhayaratne, who is also Professor of Nutrition. Dr. Baptist has done much work on the role of amino acids in nutrition, particularly in the Ceylon diet, but apparently is getting interested in nucleic acids. The laboratory rooms at the University are large and although they seem to be overloaded with little-used equipment, ample space could be arranged for the biochemistry phase of an ICNND nutrition survey.

10. The showing of the Ethiopia survey film was scheduled for Friday afternoon and I went to the USIS early to check on the film and on other arrangements. The people invited by Dr. Gunasekera started to arrive at 1450 hours. At 1510 hours I gave a very brief introduction and the film was turned on. There were some twenty people present and a list of most names is given in Appendix 1. After the film I opened the discussion which then lasted for well over an hour. Most active participants were Dean Abhayaratne, Dr. Baptist, Professor de Silva, Dr. Gunasekera, and Dr. Nimalasuria who participated in the early nutrition surveys conducted in Ceylon by Professor Nicholls. The discussion dealt as much with survey techniques as with the particular situation in Ceylon. There was considerable discussion of the significance of milk production in tropical countries. With considerable effort, Ceylon has made great strides during the last few years in the production and sanitary distribution of milk. As often is the case, it was my feeling that one of the accomplishments of this conference was to bring together the local people concerned with nutrition. Although some participants departed earlier, it was about 1750 hours when the discussions ended and we all left the USIS. I was very much pleased with the interest shown by the participants of the conference.
11. Saturday morning, I worked on my notes and went to the airline offices to check on my flight reservations. I was picked up at 1400 hours by a Ministry of Health car and Mr. Ivor Murugupillai, Information Officer, for the trip to Matale. Traditionally, we stopped in Kandy at the Queens Hotel for a spot of good Ceylon tea. Subsequently the driver lost his way on the country roads and thus we arrived at the school building where the meeting was held, at 1840 hours, ten minutes later than the show was to go on. There was an audience of about 250, including about 120 teachers. I met the Deputy Director of Health Services, Dr. P. Rajasingham, Mr. Riley and other officials from the Ministry and from the district. In view of the fact that most of the audience did not understand English, we turned off the sound track of the Ethiopia survey film and I fed an excellent interpreter from the Ministry a sentence-by-sentence description of what the film was showing. The audience was most attentive but the most gratifying part of the affair was the series of searching questions which were asked by the conference participants after the film showing. Sample questions: "Can nutritional diseases be cured by food or is medicine needed?"

and "What does the United States do when the survey finds deficiencies?" Some fifteen questions were asked during the next hour until Mr. Riley closed the meeting. This gave me an opportunity to talk briefly with Dr. Rajasingham and the other officials. Then, after a brief yet so familiar confusion about transportation we started on the homeward trek, the driver lost his way again, and we arrived in Colombo at 0115 hours Sunday.

12. Sunday morning, December 11, I had an appointment with Mr. Alles who wished to discuss the possibilities of his doing graduate work in the United States. At 1100 hours I had an appointment to visit the Director of Health Services, Dr. W. A. Karunaratna at his home. I was also invited for lunch at his house. I briefly described the ICNND and its survey but did not get very far before Dr. Karunaratna started to question me about the possibility of a nutrition survey in Ceylon. He asked, in particular, about the required duration, the size of the team, the financial obligations falling upon the local government, the procedure of reporting, and post-survey follow-up. It is my impression that Dr. Karunaratna considered a nutrition survey in Ceylon desirable and feasible and that he was ready to give it serious consideration. I left the ICNND leaflet on the request for the survey, a copy of the Manual, and several survey reports with him. This was a most satisfactory conference. By this time the first luncheon guests arrived and I found that the company consisted predominantly of Ministry officials and of visiting medical people (including Prof. Jens Waerhaug of Norway conducting a WHO dental survey in Ceylon) and consequently the discussion was most interesting and enjoyable.
13. I returned to the Galle Face Hotel mid-afternoon and left via BOAC for Rome at 2300 hours. Next day, December 12, I spent an hour at FAC in Rome with Dr. Autret and others in the Nutrition Division, went to Paris via TWA, and flew via PAA to New York, arriving Geneva, New York in the evening of December 13, Tuesday.
14. Summary. With the two showings of the ICNND Ethiopia survey film and the various discussions noted above, a number of key personnel concerned with nutrition in Ceylon have been made familiar with the purposes and operations of the ICNND. The reception was sympathetic and their attitude gave me the impression that local authorities would favor a nutrition survey. The only uncertainty comes from the political situation which is fluid and difficult to predict. As one official pointed out, it is almost certain that the Ceylon Government will favor such a survey as a means of showing its concern for the welfare of the people. It is my opinion that a successful survey would be useful to Ceylon and enhance United States prestige in this uncommitted country. It is my view that a small team and a total working period of five weeks or even less would be sufficient to complete a nutrition survey in this small country having such excellent roads and other transportation facilities.

15. Recommendations. It is recommended that my visit be followed up with official contacts between the ICNND Secretariat and various Ceylon officials, particularly the Director of Health Services. It is further recommended that due to the difficult political situation in Ceylon, State Department and Embassy officials be even more intimately involved in the planning of a survey than is usually necessary.
16. I have, of course, much additional detailed information on Ceylon, not given in this brief report, and shall be pleased to assist in any manner if the ICNND decides to pursue further the possibility of the nutrition survey in Ceylon.

APPENDIX I

Partial list of those present at the showing of the Ethiopia survey film and discussion of nutrition survey techniques, Colombo, December 9, 1960.

Prof. O. E. R. Abhayaratne, Dean, Medical Faculty, University of Ceylon, Professor of Nutrition
Prof. C. C. de Silva, Professor of Pediatrics, University of Ceylon
Dr. N. G. Baptist, Biochemistry Department, University of Ceylon
Dr. M. C. Karunairatnam, Biochemistry Department, University of Ceylon
Mr. E. Lieversz, Statistical Department, Health Services
Dr. (Mrs.) B. V. deMel, Nutrition Department, Medical Research Institute
Dr. D. B. Gunasekera, Acting Deputy Director of Health (Laboratory Services)
Mr. R. P. R. Padley, Nutrition Department, Medical Research Institute
Mr. P. G. Somasundaram, Nutrition Department, Medical Research Institute
Mr. J. J. Jayatilleke, Nutrition Department, Medical Research Institute
Mr. D. A. Seneviratne, Nutrition Department, Medical Research Institute
Dr. K. Mahadeva, Nutrition Department, Medical Research Institute
Mr. L. A. C. Alles, Chemist (Food Technologist) Marketing Department Ministry of Agriculture
Prof. Jens Waerhaug, Professor of Dentistry, (Norway)
Mr. J. Abayakoon, Census and Statistics Department
Mr. L. N. Perera, Census and Statistics Department
Dr. Ananada Nimalasuria, Member of the Milk Board